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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000679

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY/GEORGIA: ABKHAZIA DISCONNECT

REF: A. TBILISI 536

[1](#)B. ANKARA 643

[1](#)C. 07 ANKARA 2596

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Kelly Degnan, reasons 1.4 b, d

[1](#)1. (C) The GOT has told Georgia it is ready to facilitate Georgia's Abkhaz autonomy proposals (ref A and B), Georgian DCM Irakli Koplatadze told us April 8. Turkish facilitation is acceptable to Georgia, he said, as Georgian President Saakashvili has previously told President Gul and FM Babacan.

However, Koplatadze implied a level of discomfort with Turkey's objectives, and suggested that a disconnect exists between the two sides on how to proceed. The Georgians are concerned that Turkey -- despite its oft-pronounced commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and Euro-Atlantic aspirations -- chose not to support offering Georgia a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) in the absence of NATO consensus on the issue -- a weak position in his view. Tbilisi, he said, is also annoyed with a recent Turkish state broadcaster (TRT) segment on Abkhazia in which Abkhaz de-facto president Bagapsh was interviewed and reportedly discussed Abkhazia's independence aspirations. (We have not seen the broadcast.) Georgia believed it had a GOT assurance the segment would not be transmitted, and has complained to the TRT Director and to MFA.

[1](#)2. (C) Koplatadze acknowledged that a Bagapsh visit would allow the Turks to inveigh upon the Abkhaz the importance of Georgia's autonomy offer and propose to the Abkhaz "opening a Turkish window." MFA officials have complained to us the Georgians keep pulling the plug on an "unofficial" Bagapsh visit, much to the annoyance of the five million-strong ethnic-Abkhaz community in Turkey (ref C). Koplatadze suggested -- for the first time to us -- that Russia may have discouraged Bagapsh from visiting Turkey in the past, implying that Georgia could not so easily dictate to the Turks whether Bagapsh can visit in a private capacity, as the guest of the Turkish-Abkhaz community. (In an October 16, 2007 meeting, he characterized Georgia as dead set against the visit, unofficial or not.) Georgia, he said, can accept a Bagapsh visit to Turkey, so long as it is done quietly and for the purpose of facilitating a dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia. Georgia cannot accept a highly-public Bagapsh visit to Turkey, providing him a platform to advance Abkhaz independence demands. Commenting on the Trabzon-Sukhumi ferry connection, he reiterated that the Abkhaz have rejected Georgia's proposal to embed Georgian custom authorities with Turkish authorities in Trabzon to provide Georgian customs clearances for ships traveling from Trabzon to Sukhumi directly; he was unclear of the latest Turkish thinking is on

the proposal. A lack of customs clearance has caused GOG authorities to interdict Turkish ships en route to Abkhazia in the past -- an irritant in the relationship with Turkey he said Georgia would like to eliminate.

13. (C) Koplatadze underlined that Turkey is an ally and partner, committed to Georgia's territorial integrity. In order to help bridge the gap between Ankara and Tbilisi, and position Turkey to play the facilitating role it wants to, Koplatadze believed Turkey needs to more actively support Georgia's NATO aspirations and encourage a more constructive position from the Turkish-Abkhaz community. As he often does, Koplatadze expressed wariness of Ankara's efforts to balance relations with Moscow, citing Turkish energy dealings and Black Sea security cooperation.

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